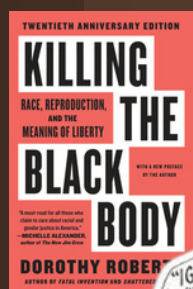# ANTHOLOGY

UNIVERSITY WRITING: RACE & ETHNICITY

TESTIMONIALS

STUDENT
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Creative Statement

University Writing is a mandatory course, one curated to teach all Columbia University students *how* to write—in order to be successful at the University. Often times, this felt redundant, as our work and learning could not be reflective of genuine curiosity or a unique, narrative tongue. In their book, *How Scholars Write,* Aaron Ritzenberg and Sue Mendelsohn express how "successful scholars practice principled strategies that anyone can adopt in order to craft academic writing that matters." The definition of "success," in this case, refers to their previous discussion on published authors and contributors to academia. They describe this accomplishment as one being accessible to "anyone" through a series of frameworks, tips and tricks, and stylistic techniques. But if these methods of writing are strictly sanctioned to us, 4% of student writers across the world, does this not exclude other methods of research and analysis? Who and what is deemed credible, and why?

This is precisely what Professor Brown allowed us to explore, question, and critique. There were many mornings we would center less on the rhetorical techniques of the scholars we were analayzing, and more on the understanding and significance of why we are doing that work we are doing. In these conversations, "meaningful change" became questioned and critiqued, as we seldom felt that going through the expected motions of the course could genuinely add to the complexity of scholarly discussion, or even our own perspectives of the world, our fields of study, and our outlook towards the pursuit of justice. Without the constant reminders of our geography, our positionality, and our temporal standpoint, our experience in this classroom might have plateaued to a complacency with the curriculum and with the standards of racial and gender inequality we endure today.

I compile this antholoogy to tell the story of this tension. The tension between obtaining "academic success" at this University, but never doing so at the expense of our authentic voice, our identities, our families, and our goals. This course genuinely served as our outlet of aggravation to cope with this time's uncertainty, brining us closer to practicing a justice-first model in the diverse fields we will all go off to navigate.

Acknowledgements

"In a world of possibility for us all, our personal visions help lay the groundwork for political action." Audre Lorde

"It's not about supplication, it's about power. It's not about asking, it's about demanding. It's not about convincing those who are currently in power, it's about changing the very face of power itself." Kimberle Crenshaw

"You write in order to change the world ... if you alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change it." James Baldwin

"History is time that won't quit." Suzan-Lori Parks, The America Play and Other Works

For those who wish to deconstruct these systems from the inside out.

Jargon in Justice: How to Make Legal Studies More Accessible
By: Shloka Mehta

If justice is supposed to serve everyone, why does its language shut so many people out? Specifically, scholarship surrounding the marginalization of people of color in United States' legal systems never seems to speak to the communities that are affected by its research. This can be seen through the works of scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw and Dorothy Roberts, both of whom discuss legal systems in their works but fail to make their language accessible to those who it affects. For example, Crenshaw's groundbreaking critique of our legal system and the ways in which it ignores intersectionality, a term that she coined, utilizes legal jargon such as "single-axis framework" which explains critical ideas but leaves non-specialists behind.

This can be contrasted with the works of Mari J. Matsuda, whose work is known for its casual tone and direct call to action. Matsuda does not feel the need to use overly complex language to elicit an emotion in the reader through word choice or diction. In fact, she actively denounces these more nuanced methods, stating that "it is not enough to sit there reading law review articles, exclaiming "'OMG, she gets it!'" She passes judgment on her readers, arguing that whatever activism they may feel they are doing does not suffice. To Matsuda, a feeling is not enough in the face of the injustices communities of color are facing. Matsuda's piece demands action from the reader, which sets it apart from the other two authors. This act reduces the distance set between Matsuda and her paper, allowing the reader to relate more clearly to her work.

The academic distance held between authors and their texts has a negative effect on the readership of their work. The use of complex legal jargon restricts the number of people who can interpret and understand the point of an article. The average person is more likely to find an academic article, simply put, boring if the language describing the issue is incomprehensible to them. This creates a knowledge gap that perpetuates the very structural inequality that legal scholars are writing about. The effect of this gap is that marginalized communities remain at the mercy of experts who control the narrative but fail to make it actionable. The fact that the few members of these minority groups who are academics continue this trend is doubly disheartening.

There is strength in numbers. While academics may do the intellectual work of creating theories and articulating problems, actual legal reform requires more than papers. Action is created by the masses, the very people who cannot access the works of these pivotal legal scholars. This lack of access inherently restricts the number of people who know about a legal issue, therefore diminishing the number of people who can and are willing to do something about it. The greater the number of people who understand the systemic issues affecting marginalized communities, the greater the potential for meaningful collective action.

Imagine the impact if each and every woman of color in the United States understood and was able to articulate the concept of intersectionality. If they could defend themselves when discriminated against in the workplace, if they could point towards a specific word that explained the layers of oppression they were experiencing, it could transform societal structures and dynamics. This knowledge, this power, is hidden away in the pages of the Harvard Law Review among words like "The embrace of identity politics" or "the denial of reproductive liberty."

So how can we democratize this information-sharing process? Matsuda's text provides a model for a more equitable reading experience. Her straightforward, colloquial language allows readers of all educational backgrounds to understand her point of view. Her writing is clear, urgent, and unflinchingly personal, creating a more accessible article that engages the reader. Matsuda aligns herself with the people she is writing for, breaking down the barriers that legal jargon often creates. If authors such as Roberts and Crenshaw were to follow this convention, their texts would become much more readable by the general public.

Justice should not require a degree. To create more radical change, and faster, we must reform the way we write about it. Language has always been used as a tool for both inclusion and exclusion. In this case, we should strive to make the language we use in academic papers, especially those concerning justice-related activism or the marginalization of communities of color, accessible to those who we are writing about. Knowledge is indeed power and by modifying our language, we can disseminate more knowledge to greater impact.

The Hidden Cost of Exclusion in STEM: Why Marginalizing Women of Color Stifles Innovation in Consumer-Facing Technologies and the Pharmaceutical Field
By: Esha Murthy

When we think about the future of technology, we often imagine groundbreaking innovations that will improve lives and create more equity in society. The reality that we often overlook is that the technologies we use, from consumer-facing technologies, including life-saving pharmaceuticals, are shaped by the people who create them. When women—particularly women of color—are excluded from key decisions and design processes, the products that result are often biased and less effective for diverse populations. The result isn't just a failure of inclusion, it's a failure of innovation.

Women, and especially women of color, remain severely underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). This issue causes a greater loss of social innovation and progress because technologies that emerge from these fields often reflect the perspectives and needs of a narrow group of people, particularly dominant social groups. Without diversity at the leadership level, products, especially consumer-facing technologies like pharmaceuticals, fail to address the needs of marginalized communities and perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality provides a critical lens for understanding this problem. Intersectionality looks at how different forms of identity, such as race and gender, interact to create unique experiences that create disadvantages for particular groups. In the context of STEM, this means that women of color face compounded discrimination, both gendered and racial, which limits their access to educational opportunities, career advancement, and leadership positions (Crenshaw 6). Crenshaw's work shows the importance of addressing these intersecting barriers to create more inclusive environments. In STEM, however, this is often overlooked in favor of diversity initiatives that treat race and gender as separate issues, rather than as interconnected forces that need to be addressed (Crenshaw 6). The result is not just an inequitable society, but a missed opportunity for groundbreaking innovations (Fitzgerald 7). Intersectionality can offer pathways to more inclusive and socially responsible innovation in consumer-facing technologies.

In STEM, this systemic marginalization starts early in education. Sue Rosser, a leading scholar in gender and science, agrees with Crenshaw and argues that educational systems are

often structured in ways that favor the experiences of white men, with curriculum and group work that prioritizes males and excludes the contributions of women of color particularly (Rosser 3). This creates a hostile learning environment for those in marginalized groups, many of whom feel like outsiders in STEM classrooms, and as a result, often drop out or switch fields altogether (Rosser 3). Her analytical language and tone in her text mirrors Crenshaw's, creating a clearer picture of the marginalization faced and shows that these stereotypes must be eliminated as a seeming call-to-action. This lack of representation in education extends into the workforce, where women of color frequently encounter the "glass ceiling," an invisible barrier that prevents them from advancing to leadership roles, despite their qualifications (Cotter et al., 3). When women of color are absent from decision-making roles, technologies can reinforce harmful stereotypes or overlook the needs of marginalized groups, preventing true innovation.

The glass ceiling in STEM, however, isn't a simple case of stereotypes. It's reinforced by policies and the belief that women of color are inferior. This idea is built upon by Crenshaw, who explains that these compounded racial and gendered barriers create experiences that are distinct from those of white women or men of color in STEM, or even white males, and those differences need to be recognized and addressed if we are to create truly inclusive environments (Crenshaw 4). By juxtaposing these two ideas and groups in society, we are able to see the stereotypes that both face and the impacts when put together.

For example, the pharmaceutical industry, an area where these exclusionary practices have serious consequences, is an important case. For decades, clinical trials have predominantly focused on white, male bodies, leaving the health needs of women and people of color under-researched. This lack of representation in drug development has led to treatments that are less effective or even harmful to these populations. Caroline Criado Perez, in her book Invisible Women, outlines how medical products have been designed with male bodies in mind, leading to a gender data gap that has significant implications for women's health (Perez 4). Women of color, particularly, face even more barriers. For instance, a study in the Journal of the American Medical Association shows Perez's point and found that Black patients with certain heart conditions were less likely to benefit from widely prescribed medications (Hines et al. 2019). The journal's use of statistical evidence and quantitative data shows how women and minorities have been excluded from STEM education, and the importance of having diverse voices in medical research and product development.

Beyond social justice or equality, the issue is innovation itself and the perpetuation of biases. When leadership in STEM fields is homogenous, the products and technologies that result inevitably reflect the perspectives of a limited group. In medicine, this means that drugs and medical devices designed without considering the needs of women and people of color can be dangerous or exclusionary. On a broad, societal level, continuing to exclude women of color from leadership roles, reinforces a narrative that certain voices are more valuable than others, perpetuating existing social inequalities when consumers see the prioritization of particular groups as a reflection of the technologies they are using (Fitzgerald 7). Diverse leadership teams are better equipped to identify gaps in products and services, challenge stereotypes, and create solutions that are both innovative and equitable.

It's time to change the way we think about diversity in STEM—not as a mere box to check but as an essential course for the future of innovation. A more inclusive approach to STEM means creating policies that not only increase representation but also address the unique challenges faced by women of color. To make this vision a reality, rethinking educational practices, improving mentorship opportunities, and eliminating the glass ceiling that prevents these women from reaching leadership positions is important.

These policies must recognize the unique challenges women of color face and create an environment that fosters equal opportunities for success. As policymakers and industry leaders, the future of technology is only as inclusive as the people who create it, and if we want technology to further society overall, we need to make sure that everyone has a say at the table. Technologies and societal progress must consider the compounded disadvantages that women of color face in STEM and the advantages they can provide. By applying this framework of intersectionality to address these barriers experienced by women of color, we can create a more inclusive and innovative future. If we want to build technologies that truly serve everyone, we must ensure that all voices are heard, particularly those that have been historically excluded. It's imperative to reimagine STEM as a field that values the perspectives of all people, which can uproot stereotypes and unlock the full potential of innovation for the benefit of society as a whole.

Engineering Equality: the Importance of Continuous Research to Overcome Systemic Racism and Gender Bias in STEM Institutions

By: Rosa Prado

America's history of systematic racism allows us to further analyze its role in promoting discrimination against minority groups in the context of engineering institutions. The American system has long been influenced by deeply rooted racist beliefs and stereotypes against Black people. Documentaries like I Am Not Your Negro by Raoul Peck reflect the historical context of race relations in America, and contemporary issues of systemic racism and social injustice today. The documentary pushes society to speak up against the negative influence of racism in other institutions in America. This moved thinkers like me to look into where else this unfairness is being manifested, and as a woman of Hispanic background, race and gender inequality have become significant challenges to work against as I pursue a career in STEM.

Throughout the engineering field, we can see many examples of gender and race stigmatization hindering the success of minority groups in such large institutions and fields. While we could ignore society's standards with resilience and determination, future policies and the admission process of engineering institutions continue to create challenges in promoting the importance of female engineers, as these institutions often lack an engaging and supportive environment. This observation highlights the systemic barriers that persist and are particularly concerning for individuals like myself who are navigating these challenges. This leads me to my personal incentive to call for better and more effective practices to dismantle policies and stereotypes that are hurting the performance of people of different genders and races in engineering institutions.

First, authors like Kimberle Crenshaw in her article "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law," present a political lens to dive more into the complex history of racist systems. Her political framework pushes us to examine how policies reinforce racial disparities, and how effective the political lens is in analyzing engineering education. Crenshaw argues that legal reform is promoting a discriminatory world because it strengthens racial inequality. Overall, Crenshaw concludes that making sense of legal reform would improve the government and system, and motivate us to seek genuine and effective solutions for racism and racial inequality.

Additionally, Crenshaw's words have inspired scholars like Sue V. Rosser to analyze the crucial gaps in knowledge when creating practices to promote inclusivity in said institutions. In Rosser's article, "Group Work in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics: Consequences of Ignoring Gender and Race", she highlights the disregarded importance of upbringing when creating inclusive collaborative spaces in engineering institutions. The assistant professor's failure to recognize the importance of upbringing has led to disappointment and negative feedback from the students, as merely analyzing race and gender does not foster collaborative and supportive groups.

Clearly, more research on gender and race dynamics in engineering institutions must be done to redirect our focus on implementing diversity through collaborative group work in these engineering spaces.

On top of that, Susan L. Murray and the co-authors of "Addressing Gender Issues in the Engineering Classroom" bring up the importance of advocacy and exerting authority. Their research led them to conclude that the faculty exercising their authority and advocating for gender equality in male-dominated fields is essential in improving the situations of women as they pursue a career in STEM. They highlighted how the widespread indifference and unwillingness of men to discuss how negative gender dynamics lead to a lack of engagement and success of women in STEM is alarming. This continued ignorance of women's struggle in STEM contributes to minimal support for female students. However, faculty intervention could make a significant difference and promote equal treatment and respect.

From these examples, now you have seen the importance of continuing to research and dive deeper into the effectiveness of the methods we're using to promote inclusivity in STEM fields, especially engineering institutions.

Lastly, on the recruitment side of institutions, scholars like Amy E. Slaton show the importance of representation. She is clear in her recommendations on how the recruitment process works and highlights how it can be improved.

To sum it up, we can see the effect of research in finding ways to bridge the support gap in engineering institutions. This is incredibly relevant as more women pursue careers in STEM. It is important that engineering institutions are welcoming and supportive of their aspirations; prioritizing research will make the journey smoother for future generations. Although some women persevere in the face of a challenging environment, it is important that we start creating

change now. Without these changes, the STEM field may continue to be unwelcoming for future generations of girls and minorities, potentially leading to no participation on their part.

Now more than ever, researchers must keep working. They must address and continue discussing how justice can be distributed to the overlooked, but valuable race and gender groups pursuing STEM.

Confronting the Model Minority Myth as a First-Year, First-Generation Student At An Elite Institution

By: Ruby Ho

"How do I navigate a system that wasn't built for students like me?" This question constantly plagues my mind as a first-generation Vietnamese American student, finishing my first semester at Columbia University as an aspiring biomedical engineering major.Getting into Columbia felt like winning the lottery, a dream I thought would solidify my worth. But now that I'm here, I've started to question my place, not because I lack ambition or work ethic but because the narrative of who I'm 'supposed to be' doesn't align with the reality of who I am."

As a first-generation, low-income student, I face a unique kind of invisibility within a myth that insists people like me excel effortlessly in academics, especially in STEM. Such pervasive stereotypes can be inferred from the Model Minority Myth (MMM), which portrays Asian Americans as inherently hardworking, successful, and intelligent, especially in academics and professional fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

On the surface level, it seems like a compliment, but in reality, it's a harm disguised as praise. It perpetuates systemic racial inequities, erases the struggles of underrepresented Asian subgroups like Southeast Asians, who may not have had the same educational opportunities as their East Asian counterparts, and dismisses our real need for support. Growing up in an immigrant household and going to public school my whole life, I balanced academic aspirations with the responsibilities of being the eldest daughter, often without the resources or preparation my peers enjoyed.

In high school, I worked tirelessly to excel in math and science, yet teachers assumed I didn't need help. When I struggled, they dismissed it, saying, "You'll be fine,". These assumptions followed me to college, where the gaps in my preparation became glaringly obvious. In my first physics class at Columbia, I felt overwhelmed by material that seemed second nature to my peers who have already taken AP courses and specialized prep similar to the curriculum. Asking for help felt like admitting failure not just as a student but as someone who was supposed to "get it."

The MMM doesn't just harm individuals like me, it undermines systemic equity. It denies us access to the resources we need to succeed. Programs and scholarships for underrepresented

minorities often exclude Asian Americans because we're assumed to be thriving. But aggregated data hides the reality: while some Asian subgroups, like Chinese and Indian Americans, benefit from structural privileges, others, like Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian Americans, face significant barriers rooted in war, displacement, and poverty.

For students like me, the stakes are high. Institutions like Columbia pride themselves on diversity, but often that diversity feels performative. Programs for first-generation or low-income students are limited and fail to address the unique challenges of those who don't fit the MMM mold. This creates an environment where being "average" feels like failure, and struggling is seen as a sign that you don't belong.

But struggling doesn't mean you don't belong, it means you're human. Over the course of my first semester, I've started to redefine what belonging looks like. For me, learning to navigate these barriers has been a journey of unlearning. Building a community of first-generation friends, attending tutoring sessions, and seeking guidance from upperclassmen have reminded me that growth comes from acknowledging and addressing challenges, not hiding them.

Addressing the harm of MMM requires more than personal resilience, it demands systemic change. Higher institutions like Columbia must move beyond surface-level diversity initiatives and actively dismantle stereotypes that obscure inequality. This means disaggregating data to reveal the unique needs of underrepresented Asian subgroups, expanding mentorship programs, and creating an environment where all students feel empowered to seek support without fear of judgment.

The model minority myth perpetuates systemic neglect. Underrepresented Asian groups are swept under a broader Asian American umbrella, losing access to scholarships, outreach programs, and resources earmarked for "minority" students. By exposing its harm and reimagining belonging, we can create spaces where students are valued for who they are, not for who society expects them to be.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Are More Than Just Buzzwords
By: Ricardo Victorio

Collaboration is the engine of progress. Yet, in many fields—from STEM to business, education, and beyond—collaboration often stalls—not because of a lack of talent, but because systemic exclusion remains pervasive. Despite decades of initiatives aimed at fostering diversity, marginalized voices are routinely sidelined, leaving a wealth of ideas untapped and progress stifled.

The problem isn't awareness of exclusion; it's society's reluctance to confront its deeper structural causes. Kimberlé Crenshaw's critique of reformism in "Race, Reform, and Retrenchment" is eerily applicable here. She warns that "the commitment to formal equality can obscure the need for substantive changes that challenge entrenched hierarchies" (Crenshaw 1357). In many organizations, diversity dashboards, photo ops, and flashy recruitment campaigns prioritize appearance over transformation. These efforts give the illusion of progress but fail to address the cultural and structural barriers that maintain exclusion.

Recent examples make these shortcomings clear. Consider the viral controversy surrounding the racial bias in AI-powered hiring software. These algorithms, trained on biased datasets, systematically disadvantaged women and people of color in hiring recommendations. Similarly, wearable health devices—from fitness trackers to pulse oximeters—often fail to account for darker skin tones, compromising their accuracy for millions of users. These failures highlight a critical truth: exclusion isn't just a moral failure; it's a practical one, with tangible consequences for those who are marginalized and for society at large.

The root causes of exclusion go beyond overt discrimination. Sue V. Rosser, in "Group Work in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics", documents how subtle biases often leave women and minorities relegated to less visible or impactful roles. In one case, a graduate student described feeling excluded from both male- and female-dominated study groups, leaving her isolated and unsupported. Rosser observes that these dynamics "undermine collaboration, often silencing voices that could otherwise expand the group's problem-solving capacity."

This phenomenon is compounded by the fact that many workplace cultures often prioritize the voices of dominant groups. For example, in high-stakes team meetings or research collaborations, ideas presented by women or minorities are frequently dismissed or ignored until reiterated by someone from the majority group. These patterns reinforce systemic inequities,

creating an environment where inclusion is more symbolic than substantive. The consequences extend beyond individual experiences to the very innovations and solutions produced. When homogenous teams design tools or craft policies, we inevitably embed their blind spots into the final product. Eric Dahlin et al. emphasize that "homogenous teams and technologies often reproduce systemic biases," resulting in flawed innovations that fail to serve diverse populations. From AI algorithms to public policy, these blind spots can have real-world repercussions, particularly for communities already marginalized by systemic inequities.

So why does this continue? The issue lies in how society perceives progress. Diversity metrics and symbolic victories—like increased representation—are celebrated as ends in themselves. But representation without substantive inclusion is a hollow victory. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality reveals how overlapping oppressions, like racism and sexism, create unique forms of exclusion. For women of color, being in the room is rarely the same as having a voice.

Consider the experience of Dr. Chanda Prescod-Weinstein, a Black woman physicist who has spoken out about the pervasive racism and sexism she has faced throughout her career. Despite her groundbreaking contributions to theoretical physics, she has often found herself battling stereotypes and systemic barriers that question her legitimacy. Her story exemplifies how deeply rooted these issues are and how they extend even to the most accomplished individuals.

We must come to terms with these truths if we hope to foster real innovation and progress. As it stands, the structures and cultures of exclusion remain largely intact. While current initiatives may boost representation on paper, they fail to create an environment where all voices can thrive. Until these deeper issues are addressed, the promise of inclusion will remain an illusion.

Real change begins with confronting uncomfortable truths. The biases baked into workplace and institutional cultures—from boardrooms to classrooms—aren't accidental; they're the product of centuries-old hierarchies. Awareness is the first step, but awareness alone isn't enough. We must demand accountability from organizations and challenge the cultural norms that perpetuate exclusion. Only then can society move beyond the illusion of inclusion and unlock its full potential.

The Predicament of Black Athletes

By: Josiah Cunningham

There have always been discrepancies in the path taken by Black athletes in the United States. They are saluted as cultural icons on one hand and having their incredible performances fill stadiums. While on the other hand, they negotiate a challenging network of racial politics, social norms, and individual identity. Joshua Wright's examination of this problem through the views of Michael Jordan, poses important uncertainty regarding the pressures put on Black players to go far beyond their sport. Being globally marketable, neutral, and intensely focused on perfection, Michael Jordan represented the worldwide superstar. By combining sports with mainstream appeal and business endorsements, his brand reinterpreted his role. However, Wright points out that Jordan's reputation has both positive and negative effects on Black athletes today. Commercialism often overshadowed activism during his career because of his denial to get involved in racial or social justice concerns, despite the fact that his success broke perceptions of Black deficiency. For contemporary athletes, this creates a dilemma. Should they prioritize their careers and financial opportunities, following Jordan's model and ways of neutrality? Or should they leverage their platforms to address systemic racism and inequality, as athletes like Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James have done? James for example, creates riches while sponsoring schools, helping underprivileged communities, and speaking out against injustice. Through his NBA contracts and endorsement deals with well known companies like Nike, James has gathered billions of dollars during his prestigious career. His financial success has provided him with the means and a platform to promote social justice issues. Outside of court, he has continuously used his position to confront systemic racism and inequality, particularly by criticizing injustices in education, voter suppression, and police brutality.

Despite criticism that he has faced for his vocal advocacy, James's ability to maintain a successful career while fighting for justice sets a new example for athletes. James represents a balance that grounds campaigning in financial security, in contrast to earlier generations who frequently had to choose between action and job stability. However, advocacy often comes at great personal and professional risk, as Kaepernick's banishment from the NFL is a strong example. This result emphasizes the dangers Black athletes encounter when they decide to use

activism to question social norms. The story of Kaepernick serves as a warning about the riskiness of athletes who depend on establishments that are opposed to societal change. Nonetheless, Kaepernick's advocacy has made a lasting impression. Other athletes were encouraged to follow the ways as his protest motivated a larger discussion about racial injustice in sports and beyond. But yet also silence can be equally damaging, continuing a status quo that marginalizes the very communities many of these athletes come from. Black athletes are expected by society to entertain and advocate, which creates tension. This expectation frequently ignores their humanity, turning them into either inspirational or uncooperative icons, as Wright emphasizes. Going forward, Black athletes' paths shouldn't be forced into a contradiction. Their own narratives must be allowed to be defined, striking a balance between social duty and financial success, as well as ambition and authenticity. By putting job stability first, athletes can eventually accumulate the funds necessary to promote systemic change.

Silence in the face of injustice, however, runs the risk of maintaining the existing quo. Which threatens the same communities that develop these skills. Despite being strategic, lack of action could be interpreted as complicity. The decisions made by athletes are influenced by their unique circumstances, risk tolerance, and personal ideals. While others tend toward activism, being aware of costs, others could concentrate on accumulating riches and stability. Navigating cultural expectations, which often limit Black athletes to either heroes or traitors with little room for complexity, is the true problem. The problem is ultimately not a simple decision. In order to balance their professional goals with effective advocacy on their own terms, black athletes have to have the autonomy to define their roles. The move forward must acknowledge the institutional pressures that need them to carry burdens that others do not, while still respecting their individuality. Rather than relying simply on the sacrifices of a few, a more equal society requires collective action. The social expectation that Black athletes must entertain and advocate is the source of the conflict. Wright points out that this expectation frequently ignores their humanity and reduces them to either inspirational or defiant symbols. Going forward, Black athletes shouldn't have to choose between two options. They must instead be allowed to create their own stories, striking a balance between social duty and financial success, as well as ambition and authenticity. The "Black athlete's dilemma" can only be fully resolved at that point.

The Ethics of Human Experimentation and What its Legacy Means for Black Women

By: Isabel Cordero

When does human experimentation go too far?

Sometimes, it emerges from mere curiosity. Other times, it is needed for medical progress, especially when animal experimentation is no longer fruitful. However, it can quickly become unethical and harmful when vulnerable communities are exploited. In the United States, early systemic racism towards Black people made them prime targets of medical experimentation. Enslaved Black women were particularly exploited by white medical professionals, leaving them with no say about the atrocities that were done to them.

As much as human trials can quickly go awry, can they be justified? Oftentimes, when scientific trials no longer have much to gain from animal trials, it is necessary to move on to human trials. After all, while some animals and humans are genetically similar, they are not the same, thus meaning that they will likely react differently to certain medications and treatments. Moreover, scientists need to be able to assess potential side effects of the treatments so that they might improve them and, when the treatment is made public, they can minimize the number of people who may suffer from adverse reactions.

Doctors of the past had similar sentiments such as these, but they used them to exploit the Black female body. Dr. James Marion Sims, the so-called "father of American gynecology," was notorious for conducting experiments on enslaved Black women for the sake of improving a treatment for a vaginal condition found in many white women. First, he would perform surgery to recreate the condition, and then he would create incisions in an attempt to fix the ailment.

Quite morbidly, he would perform these surgeries without anesthesia, forcing other enslaved women to take turns holding each other down as other doctors could not stomach the screams of these victims. However, these experiments allowed him to perfect the surgery and perform it successfully on white women.

Are Dr. Sims' actions justifiable? One could say that he was merely performing the necessary experiments to create a medical breakthrough. In the grand scheme of things, he only

sacrificed a few lives for the sake of the many. However, the fact remains that he had to torture women to achieve this. Torture is not an ethical way to make medical advancements. Furthermore, his intentions were impure; he sought to inflict pain upon specifically Black women so that white women could reap the benefits. While his sentiments reflect those of the time, it is no excuse to treat a fellow human being like a doll.

The precedent of mistreatment set in place by experimentation on the Black female body has persisted into the present day. While unlawful and uninformed human experimentation itself is not as prominent as it was many years ago, Black women still experience the aftereffects of medical bias against them. As much as medical professionals have become much more committed to being antiracist and treating all people equally, there is no shortage of stories of doctors being racist toward Black women. The sinister evolution of exploitation into negligence has led to the deaths of many Black women, even as we strive for positive change.

For instance, in the cases of Shalon Irving and Kira Johnson, two well-off and educated Black women who had each chosen a reputable hospital to give birth in ended up dying as a result of pregnancy complications. Both of these women faced many issues postpartum, but when they were brought up to medical staff, they were simply brushed off as something insignificant. However, this negligence led their issues to spiral out of control, leading to both of their deaths. Their deaths were not the result of a lack of healthcare access or a disadvantaged economic status—they were caused by blatant systemic racism in healthcare. The story of these two women is unfortunately the story of many other Black women who seek medical attention, and it will only continue if we allow racism to permeate a field that should be focused on treating people of all races, genders, beliefs, and backgrounds equally.

There is a clear pipeline between the medical exploitation and experimentation experienced by Black women during the time of slavery and the medical negligence they experience today. If we continue with human experimentation, we may contribute harm to future generations. Yet, human experimentation remains a necessary process for creating new medicines and benefiting the majority of people. Therefore, we can only hope to find a balance that allows human experimentation to be carried out in a manner that does not harm people while still making progress in medicine.

A 1954 Psychological Study Demonstrates How We Must Combat Prejudice in the

Classroom

By: Harjaisal Brar

In the summer of 1954, a groundbreaking experiment commenced in Robbers Cave State Park in Oklahoma. Twenty-two boys were split into two groups and brought to a summer camp, which secretly doubled as a social psychological experiment. In less than a week, using specific psychological techniques, the researchers were able to produce strong prejudice between the groups, and in less than another week, they were able to reduce the prejudice to effectively zero. Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind this experiment in combination with African American history informs methods by which teachers can combat racism and sexism in the classroom.

In the first phase of this experiment, researchers kept the two groups apart, neither knowing of the other group's existence. The children in each group were encouraged to work together towards common goals which necessitated cooperation. This led to the development of an in-group for each boy, which consisted of the members of their own experimental group, along with norms and a culture derived from their group membership. This process is described by the social identity theory, which describes how individuals separate those around them into their in-group and out-group, and develop a sense of identity and change their behaviors and attitudes depending on their group memberships.

Research has found support for neurobiological pathways which encode "a distinct genetic architecture" for this process, and that group formation occurs subconsciously from even arbitrary criteria, such as wearing similar t-shirt colors. Together, this evidence appears to support the idea that in-group and out-group formation is inherent to humans. However, it also supports that the criteria by which we form these groups is flexible and arbitrary, which means that we can, using a precise methodology, control how one forms their in-group and out-group in a way that does not promote discrimination.

In the second phase of the experiment, the researchers created a powerful prejudice between the two groups in just a few days. The two groups were introduced to one another, and competed against one another for prizes that the students valued, such as trophies and medals. This produced a prejudice so strong that it led to the first group burning the second's flag, and

the second group ransacking the first's cabins. In addition, the children demonstrated increased in-group favoritism and out-group stereotyping. This process is described by realistic conflict theory, which describes how the perception of a gain for one's out-group at the expense of a loss for one's in-group leads to negative out-group stereotyping, perceptions of group threat, discriminatory behaviors, and ethnocentrism. By creating a "conflict" over prizes, researchers utilized this theory in order to create prejudice between the groups.

Kimberlé Crenshaw describes a clear example of how White slave owners utilized this exact process in order to exacerbate racism to "maintain the support of non-slaveholding whites," even though it was in the interests of poor White people to align with enslaved Black people in economic movements. She describes the case of Tom Walton, a leader of the Populist movement in the 1890s, who in his early career spoke to Black and White audiences, telling them that "you are made to hate each other" because of "the keystone of financial despotism which enslaves you both." However, a little over a decade later, Watson had joined a movement that worked to disenfranchise Black people, because he had "persuaded himself that only after the Negro was eliminated from politics could Populist principles gain a hearing" — the exact idea that the success of Black people comes at a cost to White people. This example illustrates how racism was constructed in the U.S. through realistic conflict theory, showing how, despite some progress, racism still plays a significant role in society, including in the classroom.

In the third phase of the experiment, prejudice was greatly reduced by creating situations which required the groups to work together, such as fixing the water supply or a broken-down truck. However, it is essential to also understand that interaction alone without a common goal, like watching a movie, did not reduce prejudice. This process is described by the contact hypothesis, which describes that prejudice can be reduced by contact between two groups, as long as four criteria are met: equal status amongst groups, the pursuit of common goals, cooperation towards said goals, and the support of some authority which encourages positive contact.

Dr. Sue Rosser has described several principles instructors should follow while planning group work in STEM courses in order to support minority students and reduce prejudice, many of which center on the tenets described by the contact hypothesis, including ensuring that underrepresented students are not "alone" in their groups, to confirm that all group members have an equal status, and grading the project based on group performance, to ensure students are

working towards a common goal. Furthermore, we could use the contact hypothesis to augment her principles, and emphasize the importance of group members having common backgrounds, the teacher encouraging a positive attitude between group members, and the formation of specific prompts which require students to work together.

Understanding the psychological mechanisms behind prejudice exacerbation and reduction through the Robbers Cave Experiment enables teachers to understand how racial and gender discrimination can be combated in the classroom through group work. By forming a connection between African American history and social psychology, instructors can understand how racism was constructed and exacerbated via the realistic conflict theory, uncovering the foundations of prejudice in the United States. Moreover, by understanding Rosser's principles for reducing discrimination in the classroom, contextualized by an understanding of the contact hypothesis, educators can create a roadmap towards making schools more equitable and inclusive. When teachers integrate these principles into their classrooms, they don't just challenge prejudice in the classroom — they challenge the broader society that perpetuates it.

Women as a Sisterhood?: Western Dominance in The Feminist Framework
By: Reesa Venterea

True or false - feminism is exclusively about gender.

False.

Unlike what the 2023 white-savior Barbie movie and Swiftie fans cut it out to be (sorry), feminism is about how gender, race, and cultural expectations intersect and how they make each woman's experience unique. While American women are focused on eliminating wage gaps, enhancing political representation, and fighting against the male gaze, non-Western forms of feminism share scarce similarities. African women are centering their women's rights movement on reviving indigenous expression and upholding food sovereignty.

Women across the world neither have it better nor worse. The struggles we endure are simply *different*.

White and Western feminist ideals are mainstream, but they simply do not mirror African and other non-Western women's rights movements. Grouping women into an all-inclusive category diminishes global fights and perpetuates a legacy of colonization. By recognizing the true differences between the focus of different feminist movements, we can squash this "universalized" notion of feminism and transform it into sub-movements of cultural specificity.

The history of Black feminism in America reveals the underlying motives of feminism that modern day movements sadly mirror. The first wave of American feminism was centered around white women's suffrage, cultivated by Mary Wollstonecraft's work in Britain and Cady Stanton's efforts during the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention. Such events resulted in an un-intersectional approach to female justice that further oppressed Black women in their country of citizenship. We are well familiar with America's false advertising as holding "liberty and justice for all," but women's movements were only created to aid a single category and race.

This is an ongoing struggle that Kimberle Crenshaw, a researcher and civil rights activist who coined the term "intersectionality," conceptualizes as "America's failure to make good on its promise of racial equality." In fact, Black women were not just excluded from founding feminist efforts—they were used as a tool of weaponization in these movements. Demonstrated in Ula

Taylor's research on the "Evolution of Black Feminist Theory in America," Cady Stanton's letters regarding the Fifteenth Amendment included a question on if the African race was composed entirely of males. Taylor, an African American Studies Professor at the University of California-Berkeley, frames Stanton's ploy as "less than sincere" and a "last-ditch effort to save the franchise for her constituency." This analysis exhibits how feminism in America was not created with the very intention to not be applicable to non-White women. So why are we so hell-bent on using this wildly outdated doctrine?

African women's origin and practice of feminism differ vastly from American women's forms of resistance, demonstrating a need for the deconstruction of universality in these rights movements. In fact, the term "feminism" is widely controversial in African states, as the matter yields a connotation with imperialist thought to revolt against male community members and institutions. However, much of African cultural life rests on the co-dependence between the male and female positions in society. To adopt a "feminist" (Westernized) agenda, African women must work against the same institutions that actually aid their success and womanhood.

Unlike America's roots in sexist and demoralizing violations of women, African culture in totality is not anti-women and thus not anti-feminism, a crucial characteristic juxtaposing this universalized quota for women's rights movements. Like Iris Marion Young outlines in her paper, "Gender as Seriality: Thinking About Women as a Social Collective," to Western feminists, "Third World Women are seen as powerless victims of patriarchy." But as we just solidified, African women's subordination to men is not quite the clause of feminism. If this unfounded, incorrect, and colonial perspective on women in Africa and the Global South persists, no method of women's rights in the West will be effective in doing justice to their unique state of gendered oppression.

These differences only reveal the tip of the iceberg on cultural differences that the globalized feminist movement fails to acknowledge.

By placing one's identity and experiences at the center of feminist work, the positioning of non-Western women in need of "saving" by Western frameworks can be revised, reformed, and emerge as more culturally specific.

We must act carefully and mindfully approach women's rights, adopting a transnational approach to our discussion around feminism.

Is this more work? Yes.

Does this make the discussion of "feminism" more complex? Also yes.

So the real question rests: are you willing to do that work?

Why Black Women Are Missing From Surrogacy
By: Edlyn Awedoba

The Hawaii Surrogacy Center's website describes surrogacy as more than a medical process, calling it an "act of empowerment"—a way for women to financially support their families while helping others build theirs (Hawaii Surrogacy Center, 2024). However, despite its increasing popularity in the United States, Black women are the least represented group among surrogates. A study by reproductive endocrinologist Amy Kaing, reviewed 104 surrogate records, finding that 52.8% of the women were white, 38.2% Hispanic or Latina, and 3.4% Asian. Notably, Black or African American women were absent from these records.

While slavery and surrogacy are not the same, historical parallels help explain the hesitance among Black women to engage in this practice. Before the Civil War, nearly all enslaved Black mothers were effectively surrogate mothers. They bore children knowing those children would belong to slave owners. Enslaved women's reproductive roles were crucial to sustaining the system of slavery, with slaveholders controlling their reproductive choices for economic gain. This historical reality framed Black women's reproduction as something regulated by others rather than governed by personal autonomy.

It's hard to frame something as empowering when it so closely resembles the exploitative systems that dehumanized their ancestors. And while modern surrogacy is voluntary, economic vulnerability and procedural loopholes can replicate the power imbalances Black people felt in the past. This is where the trauma of history intersects with the realities of the present. For the few Black women who choose to become surrogates, the risks of exploitation are ever-present. They are often hired to "gestate their babies at low cost." In the 1993 landmark case Johnson v. Calvert, Anna Johnson, a Black single mother, entered into a gestational surrogacy contract for just $10,000—well below the minimum rate of $20,000 typically paid to first-time surrogates at the time (IEP).

In Johnson's case, she later decided that she wanted to keep the baby. However, the advanced reproductive technology used for the procedure left her with no genetic claim to the child she carried. The fact that the baby was white became a key factor in preventing Johnson from asserting legal parenthood. Not only was she severely underpaid, but she was also left with no ties to or rights over the child she spent nine months carrying and birthing—an experience eerily reminiscent of the exploitation Black women endured during slavery. This case

emphasizes how surrogacy, despite its modern framing, can entrench the same racial and economic hierarchies that have historically disempowered Black women.

At the same time, the lack of Black surrogates makes surrogacy less accessible to Black families. For those who do pursue surrogacy, the idea of entrusting a surrogate of another race with their child can feel deeply alienating—a slap-in-the-face reminder of a system that has historically prioritized white families over their own.

Consider the experience of Jennifer Taylor-Skinner, a Black woman experiencing secondary infertility who searched for a surrogate to carry her now-daughter. In 2020, a white surrogate named "Kelly" rejected their profile, citing "political reasons." Taylor-Skinner's family profile included no overt political content, but family photos made it clear they were an interracial family. This rejection, compounded by "Kelly's" stated refusal to work with families from China, represents how racism and xenophobia subtly operate within the surrogacy industry (Today, 2023). For families like Taylor-Skinner's, these microaggressions reinforce a sense of exclusion in a process meant to create "life and joy."

So who exactly is surrogacy an "act of empowerment" for? It's certainly not for black women. What does it mean when one group of women feels excluded from a process that is meant to empower? What does it say about our society that Black women—whose reproductive labor was once exploited—are now absent from an industry that claims to offer choice and liberation? If surrogacy isn't empowering for Black women, then its claim to empower anyone rings hollow. Empowerment must include all women, not just the privileged few.

Surrogacy is often framed as a modern solution to infertility, but its benefits remain unevenly distributed. Until we confront the historical and cultural barriers that prevent Black women from participating fully in this process—both as surrogates and as intended parents—we cannot claim that surrogacy is truly empowering or inclusive. Addressing these inequities demands more than acknowledgment. It requires real change: a commitment to destigmatizing infertility and surrogacy in Black communities, ensuring fair treatment and compensation for marginalized surrogates, and confronting the subtle but pervasive biases within the surrogacy industry. Only then can surrogacy fulfill its promise of empowerment—for everyone.

Art and the Great Race Barrier
By: Max Lam

The contemporary art world has long struggled with an ideological problem. To quote scholars Amelia Kraehe and Joni Acuff, impeded access to art "is deeply implicated in the production and maintenance of social inequalities" (Kraehe and Acuff 295). In other words, in art, there is a deep resistance to acknowledging racial construction as a product of universalized white supremacy. And in a world as globalized and politicized as ours, such staunch adherence to our myopic views of "truth" may be both intellectually and politically unsustainable.

Since the deaths of George Floyd, Trayvon Martin, Breonna Taylor, and a seemingly endless stream of innocent Black citizens who have died in a series of racially motivated attacks, the violent consequences of the unresolved tensions between races have largely defined the past few years of public discourse in America. One can easily observe that American society has become so vitriolic and polarized as a society due in part because many have not been taught or simply refuse to engage critically with the stories of other people around us. We're overpoliticized, increasingly demoralized, and argumentative, too content sitting in our boxes of conformity and confirmation bias. Of the countless reforms to consider for this anti-discrimination revolution, art is one we might not typically think of.

So how can art help us make sense of these complex dynamics? The simple truth is that what we see around us matters: one need only consider the prominent role social media, news photography, and even memes have played in recent political discourses to understand the power of sight and experience in the process of learning. Art, as a discipline very much rooted in the tangible, descriptive, and experiential, allows us to question the legitimacy of so-called fact, and confront the age-old questions of how we should live our lives and how we should perceive everything around us.

Artist Barbara Beyerbach, for example, argued that the process of creating and admiring art has the capacity to provide layered and expansive perspectives of the world at large. After traveling to Benin for a photography project, she was fascinated by the many juxtapositions in a marketplace: the presence of Western merchandise against traditional West African fabrics implored her to explore in-depth the relationships painted by the marketplace in her art–on the dynamics of imperialism, colonial relationships between Europe, North America, and Africa, the

environment, of capitalism, and more. For Beyerbach, the applications of her art extended beyond the confines of aesthetic pleasure; it opened up new avenues of thought, of considering the greater dynamics governing the world at large.

Art also teaches us how to see ourselves. Art historian Patricia Banks identified art as "a practice of Black cultivated consumption in which they materialize and nurture their racial and class identity" (Banks 16), a means of not only communicating with the world around one, but one heavily implicated in self-actualization and self-identification.

Author Bell Hooks most aptly described how we can transform marginalization into a nursery for political expression through art and other mediums. She writes, "When I left that concrete space in the margins, I kept alive in my heart a way of knowing reality which affirms continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance…giving us ways to speak that de-colonize our minds, our very beings" (Hooks 342). Engaging with others and immersing yourself in your own personal histories is a training ground for understanding the multifaceted nature of humanity. It empowers us to see the people around us more accurately and more generously, to better understand their intentions, their perspectives, and their needs. The result is empathy and understanding.

Experiences like this can help us look towards a better future, too. Beyerbach writes, "Art allows me to take some things in deeper, imagine the consequences, and dream of alternatives" (Beyerbach 3).

By critically engaging with others around us, we may come to realize the best course of action for equality. This forward thinking is exactly what we need in our society.

To summarize, the creation of art is the creation of information interchange. Whether they are making pictures, poems, stories, speeches, or movies, artists are communicating a complex and complicated perspective of the world they observe. In this sense, we are all artists in our own right: we are transmitters and absorbers of energy and ideas, we exchange and we share, we learn and we grow, we communicate and work together. What could be better for the world?

Bringing Intersectionality Into Practice
By: Maisie McLaughlin

Critical Race Theory and the concept of intersectionality have been at the center of academic discussions for decades, but it's time to take them out of the ivory tower and into the real world. The problem isn't just that these frameworks are misunderstood—it's that their practical applications are often ignored. Intersectionality is a term first coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Professor of Law at UCLA, in her paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-Racist Politics". This concept is a lens for understanding how race, gender, and other identities don't simply overlap but interlock to create unique, compounded experiences of oppression. While scholars like Crenshaw have provided powerful insights into how these intersecting identities shape people's lives, these ideas have not escaped the confines of academia into policy. This intellectual disconnect is deeply problematic, especially as we grapple with pressing issues like the erosion of reproductive rights and the underrepresentation of Black women in STEM.

Crenshaw's foundational work on intersectionality provides tools for addressing systemic problems, yet policymakers, activists, and the public at large often engage with these issues in isolation—treating race, gender, and class as separate entities rather than interconnected forces. Crenshaw herself provides concrete evidence of this occurring in the real world: In her TED Talk, "The Urgency of Intersectionality," she discusses the case of Emma DeGraffenreid, a Black woman who filed a lawsuit against General Motors for discriminatory hiring practices, arguing that the company's hiring policies were discriminatory because they simultaneously excluded Black applicants and women. However, her case was dismissed because the court viewed the issue either as a racial problem or a gender problem, but not as the compounded issue of being both Black and female. This legal failure, Crenshaw argues, exemplifies how the lack of intersectionality in policy leaves people like DeGraffenreid—who face multiple, overlapping forms of discrimination—without recourse. This fragmented approach fails to capture the lived experiences of individuals who exist at the intersections of these identities, leaving their struggles inadequately addressed and their voices unheard. The absence of policies that address

this dual discrimination means that women of color are often forced to navigate a legal system that cannot adequately recognize or remedy their unique struggles.

Take, as another example, the Supreme Court's reversal of Roe v. Wade, ending 50 years of federal protection of abortion rights in the U.S. This landmark decision not only curtails reproductive rights for millions of Americans but also disproportionately affects women of color, who already face systemic barriers to accessing healthcare. A purely gender-based analysis of this issue might focus on the rights of women broadly, but an intersectional lens reveals how race and class amplify the challenges faced by women who are a part of other marginalized groups. Black and Latina women, for instance, are more likely to experience poverty and live in areas with limited access to abortion services, making the impact of the ruling more devastating for these women. Addressing these disparities requires more than a one-size-fits-all method; it demands intersectional policies that consider the compounded effects of race, gender, and socioeconomic status.

The persistent underrepresentation of Black women in fields like engineering also underscores the need for applied intersectional thinking. Efforts to diversify STEM industries, whether through educational programs or diversity teams, often focus on either race or gender, rarely both. Programs aimed at increasing the number of women in STEM may overlook the unique challenges faced by Black women for example, who must navigate both racial and gender biases in predominantly white, male-dominated spaces. Similarly, scholarship and internship programs designed to support underrepresented minorities may target Black students but not account for the distinct challenges Black women experience compared to their male counterparts. This oversight perpetuates a cycle of exclusion, leaving Black women underrepresented and undervalued in industries that could greatly benefit from the inclusion of their perspectives. Ultimately, achieving justice requires more than recognizing the complexity of identity—it demands action. This means acknowledging that the struggles of women of color cannot be neatly categorized into separate issues of race or gender. It additionally requires us to confront the uncomfortable reality that our systems and institutions are not just flawed but fundamentally unequal. Intersectionality offers a powerful framework for this work, but its potential will only be realized when it moves from theory to practice. By taking these ideas out of the academic sphere and into the real world, we can create a society that supports and uplifts individuals regardless of their race, gender, or class.

The Legacy of Medical Exploitation of Black Women: Why It's Still Killing Us
By: Diya Shah

Imagine being forced to undergo a medical procedure against your will, your body turned into a tool for experimentation. Imagine a system where your pain is disregarded, your suffering dismissed, and your body used as a resource for medical advancement without consent. For centuries, this was the horrifying reality for Black women in the United States, particularly during slavery. This exploitation left a long-lasting legacy that continues to impact the health of Black women today. Understanding this history, and how it intersects with systemic racism, is crucial if we are to dismantle the health disparities that still cost Black women their lives.

The History of Medical Exploitation

During the slavery era, Black women were frequently subjected to invasive and unethical medical experiments without their consent. One of the most infamous examples is Dr. James Marion Sims, often celebrated as the "father of modern gynecology." Sims performed repeated surgeries on enslaved Black women without their consent or anesthesia, under the belief that they were less sensitive to pain. His justifications were grounded in the racist belief that Black women were physiologically inferior and less susceptible to suffering.

Moreover, these injustices were not isolated acts. Medical practitioners would illegally use Black bodies for study, driven by racist scientific beliefs and a disregard for Black life. James Davidson's research on these so-called "resurrection men" revealed that Black bodies were disproportionately targeted for medical cadaver research, with evidence of anatomical dissection such as sawed femurs and skullcaps highlighting this exploitation. These beliefs and practices did not disappear after slavery ended; they evolved into biases that shaped medical education, research, and practice. How can healing occur when the foundation of care was built on the violation of Black bodies? This history is a reminder that exploitation breeds mistrust, and trust must be actively rebuilt through justice and equity.

The Continuing Legacy in Modern Healthcare

Today, Black women face disproportionate rates of death from preventable causes, reflecting this long history of neglect and exploitation. For example, Black women in the U.S. are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications compared to white women. These disparities are not the result of biological differences but systemic racism. A renowned cardiovascular researcher, Lakeshia Cousin, revealed through her work that Black breast cancer survivors face higher rates of cardiotoxicity and cardiovascular disease compared to white women. These outcomes stem from systemic inequities like unequal healthcare access, poverty, and environmental factors.

Economic disparities further highlight inequities: a higher percentage of Black patients rely on government insurance programs like Medicaid compared to white patients, and they report lower mean household incomes ($35,383 compared to $63,396). These income gaps directly limit access to preventative care, treatments, and timely interventions. Even psychological factors compound these inequities. Research conducted by Dr. Volpe reveals that awareness of these inequities leads to a 47% higher likelihood of reporting poor self-rated health. How many more lives will it take before we confront the brutal truth that racism, not biology, determines the health outcomes of Black women? The question isn't just how many lives will be lost, but how many can be saved if we finally choose to act with urgency and equity.

A Call to Action

To repair these broken systems, we must first confront their historical roots. This includes implementing systemic reforms that prioritize cultural competency training, equitable resource allocation, and improved community access to healthcare. The medical system has long fostered mistrust, but transparency and reform can rebuild relationships. As researchers such as Veena Dronamraju and health experts like Cliff Coleman suggest, improved health literacy and education are key but not sufficient on their own unless they lead to real, structural change. We must address the roots of inequity by acknowledging history, tackling social determinants of health, and investing in accessible community health programs. We must also acknowledge the concept of intersectionality, introduced by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, as a critical lens. Black women are not monolithic, and their health outcomes are

shaped by the interplay of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and historical trauma. By doing so, we can build a healthcare system grounded in equity, respect, and trust—one that truly prioritizes Black women's health and honors their lived experiences. The time to act is now. Change is not just a moral imperative, but rather a necessity to save lives and destroy systems that have caused suffering for far too long.

Black Stories Are Not Enough: Why Hollywood Needs More Black Producers
By: Joseph Akinyoyenu

A few days ago, a friend of mine implored me to watch the Oscar Best Picture-winning film Moonlight which follows Chiron through his journey in navigating race, sexuality, and family as a queer Black teen in southern Florida. Aware of its critical acclaim, I enthusiastically viewed the film and quickly understood why it took home one of Hollywood's most coveted awards. As any film fanatic does, I proceeded to scour the internet for information about the actors and director, inwardly gleaming at the inspiring Black excellence and talent. Once I looked up the producers, however, I noticed a shift–only one out of the movie's ten producers was Black. The other nine were White. Tarell Alvin McCraney, the sole Black producer, also wrote the film's original story, so his accolades (though exceedingly impressive) are not exclusively that of a producer's. I was perplexed.

Producers oversee nearly every aspect of film creation, including scriptwriting, creating budgets, and marketing (via New York Film Academy). Producers appeal to film studios for movie-funding, placing them in a crucial role in deciding which films get made and which ones do not.

Few studies pertain to the racial and ethnic makeup of Hollywood film producers. Quick Google searches, however, reveal that in many films–even ones that feature majority-Black casts–White people, especially White men, dominate the producer scene.

The cause of this pattern cannot be summed up in 750 words, but it almost certainly relates to systemic racism. Segregation in the Jim Crow Era legally divided movie audiences by race, so it follows that most Hollywood producers would have been White. Post-Jim Crow era, it is unlikely that a single individual or group of individuals has sat down to maintain this unequal distribution of producers. Rather, the observation reflects a continuation of the status quo in an inherently unequal industry.

Ana-Christina Ramón, director of UCLA's Media Research Initiative, told AP in March of last year that Hollywood has a tendency to equate "surefire hits" to "no-diversity," or "white-led" films. All of those involved in the film industry, from film students to top executives

at the largest studios, should make purposeful efforts to combat this narrative of one successful type of story in Hollywood.

It is completely valid to question why diversity in the producer scene even matters. My answer: I don't know–yet. What I do know, however, is that movies with more diverse casts make more money (via UCLA). What I also know is that, for a queer Black teen trying to understand why the world continually despises his very being, watching a film like Moonlight creates a sense of comfort and safety–a sense of not being alone. Representation of more Black directors and actors in Hollywood has seen benefits for studios, those involved in film production, and audiences. Greater representation in producers may do the same.

Despite this notion, another question arises. Moonlight, Black Panther, and Hidden Figures all had mainly White producers, but they still saw success. So, what's the issue? It could be that producers are higher up than directors and actors in terms of wealth, status, and power in the industry, reflecting lasting exclusion of Black individuals from top executive positions (these patterns exist for Fortune 500 companies and NFL owners). Or, perhaps, these films are diamonds in the rough, and we would have more like them if there was greater diversity in producers, given that people of color still remain underrepresented in every aspect of film employment (via UCLA).

Even still, why should a film that promotes Black voices on its cast and directorial side suddenly abandon this emphasis when it comes to producers? Hollywood sells audiences the notion that the industry is prioritizing Black excellence and storytelling, that Black people are capable of holding positions of power and contributing to society through numerous avenues. For this notion to exist one-dimensionally, through a creative but not an executive lens, is contradictory. If the industry wanted to fully credit the Black community, there would be more Black representation on producer boards.

Side note: Oftentimes, Black producers, like McCraney, also direct or screenwrite their productions, or do both. Ava DuVernay, Jordan Peele, and Spike Lee, three prominent Black film producers, also hold directing and screenwriting credits in many of their productions. It would be interesting to explore why Black producers seemingly must also play creative roles more so than their White counterparts.

Hollywood has made notable strides. Still, especially in regards to the producer side of things, there's more to be done.

Sources of Inspiration

There were numerous sources and archives of knowledge we were exposed to throughout the semester. We were given the chance to vulnerably reflect on these resources and scholars. bringing new meaning to how we interpret discursive acts of resistance, as well as musical, audioral, and performative gestures. The list below is comprehensive of the sources used for the above scholars' writing and research, as well as key class materials that is noted to have an impact on our classmates. We doubt we will be exposed to Baldwin, Baker, or Parks in other academic contexts, and feel privileged to walk away with an appreciation for these changemakers.

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Course Testimonials

"One day, I asked why we spend so much time asking questions that seem obvious, why Lauren constantly asked us why specific observations were "of value." She responded that we have to. It is our duty, with the privilege to attend Columbia University with its plethora of resources, to have the time to sit down and discuss these questions at all–we owe it to people, real people, to do this work, even if it begins in a small university classroom." *Joseph Akinyemi Akinyoyenu*

"My largest takeaway from this class is how interdisciplinary research is at the academia level, such as how research in critical race theory often involves statistics and can include science and medicine. It will truly inform how I plan to do research in the sciences now and in the future, in making me more open to including elements from other disciplines in my writings." *Harjaisal Brar*

"This course taught me to read like a writer, noticing intentional grammar choices and details I'd overlooked before. I learned how to analyze a wide range of media, from essays to a J. Cole music video, and experimented with writing for different audiences, adapting my tone and style. Understanding the stakes of my writing pushed me to think critically about my purpose and audience, making my work more meaningful. The semester felt like a journey of discovery, where I could take creative risks and grow as a writer, all thanks to my incredible professor!" *Diya Shamik Shah*

"As a Black female freshman in my first semester at Columbia, having Professor Brown as my University Writing instructor made me feel represented and confident in my ability to thrive here. She created a personal classroom environment, starting from day one by asking about our interests and incorporating them into her lessons. Beyond the classroom, her thoughtfulness showed in impactful gestures, like saving books tailored to our interests from her mentor's collection and bringing us donuts after every project. It was clear that she genuinely cared about us—not just as students, but as individuals—and about the material she was teaching. Her feedback always challenged me to refine my arguments and think creatively and deeply about the media I am writing about, which has transformed how I now approach academic writing at Columbia and beyond." *Edlyn Awedoba*